




Speech By  
**Dr Christian Rowan**

**MEMBER FOR MOGGILL**

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**WASTE REDUCTION AND RECYCLING AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (4.20 pm): Today I rise to give my support to the passage of the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017 which was introduced by the Hon. Dr Steven Miles MP, although there are some matters that need clarification by the minister as a part of this debate given that the Liberal National Party will not be opposing the legislation.

In June 2016 the Liberal National Party opposition leader, the honourable Tim Nicholls MP, and I as shadow minister for the environment and heritage projection gave to the people of Queensland a public commitment that a future LNP government would introduce a container deposit scheme. We also gave a commitment to eliminate the harms of single-use plastic bags. These announcements at the time prompted the minister, the Hon. Dr Steven Miles, to act because, as a consequence, we then saw the minister in July 2016 announce that the Palaszczuk Labor government would progress a container deposit scheme, with a further announcement later in November on an intended ban by Labor on lightweight plastic shopping bags. Whilst the minister is supporting the LNP's announcement, I for one am glad he is doing so as this is an important initiative for our environment, for conservation, for community organisations, for waste reduction and recycling, and for jobs in Queensland. While Labor attempts to always paint itself as the party for the environment, its record shows that it is a party big on rhetoric but does little in the way of delivering real, workable, balanced policies that help protect our environment. However, today is an exception.

Container deposit schemes have been tried and tested in over 40 jurisdictions around the world, including South Australia since 1977 and the Northern Territory since 2012. The National Litter Index has shown that Queensland has the worst litter rate in Australia at 72 items per 1,000 square metres—41 per cent higher than the national average—and I am pleased to say that this legislation based on LNP policy will hopefully introduce sensible measures to address this situation.

To those who ask, 'Can a container deposit scheme make a difference?' there are many organisations and individuals who believe the answer is yes. Clean Up Australia believes that when Queensland comes on board and implements the scheme the resultant impact will be a reduction in rubbish heading to landfill or ending up inappropriately in waterways, noticeable increases in recycling rates, a reduction in water usage and additional job creation. Clean Up Australia has found that beverage containers make up 23 per cent of litter collected in Queensland. In other states of Australia where a container deposit scheme has been introduced, more than 80 per cent of consumers return containers and redeem deposits while the remaining 20 per cent of unredeemed deposits help pay for the system to operate or are claimed by others.

The container deposit scheme is a natural progression for the Liberal National Party following on from when we were last in government, given that the LNP introduced the \$12 million Everyone's Environment grants program. Across the three rounds of the Everyone's Environment grants program a total of 308 organisations were allocated almost \$12 million to deliver projects and these projects then resulted in significant conservation and environmental improvements and achievements for

Queensland. These achievements included almost 138,000 trees being planted, over 132,000 hectares having weeds removed and over 140,000 kilograms of rubbish being removed from local waterways and associated areas with over 16,250 volunteers being engaged in such efforts.

The LNP believes a container deposit or refund scheme will not only reduce litter and clean up our environment but that it also has the potential to create hundreds of jobs in Queensland's recycling sector. The LNP also believes that local charities, community groups and sporting clubs could financially benefit from collecting containers and returning them. It is estimated that community groups could claim over \$25 million from deposits under the scheme. I note the observation made at the Agriculture and Environment Committee by the Queensland Manager of the Boomerang Alliance, Mr Toby Hutcheon, who said—

I believe that most not-for-profit and community sector groups will be very, very interested in participating in the scheme in some form. The estimated number of containers we use in Queensland that will be subject to the scheme is around 2.5 billion per year. Considering that 10 per cent may go to the not-for-profit sector that is \$25 million a year that could go into very valuable community work. In South Australia, Scouts give their federation approximately \$2.8 million from collections, so it is a considerable benefit.

I sincerely hope to see an uptake like this in Queensland. I know schoolchildren right across Queensland, including in my own electorate of Moggill, as well as my own children, are very excited about the introduction of the container refund scheme in Queensland.

Under the scheme, empty eligible 150-millilitre to three-litre drink containers with an approved refund mark will be able to be returned to a container refund point, including reverse vending machines, for a 10-cent refund. As the minister has alluded to, there is an example of that on level 3 of the Parliamentary Annexe. It is important that this House acknowledges the tremendous amount of work done by representatives on the Container Refund Scheme Implementation Advisory Group. The fact that we have this bill before us today shows the dedication and devotion of those officers from organisations such as the Australian Beverages Council, the Australian Council of Recycling, the Australian Food and Grocery Council, the Boomerang Alliance, the Association of Container Deposit System Operators, the Local Government Association of Queensland, the National Association of Charitable Recycling Organisations, the National Retail Association, Scouts Queensland, the Waste Management Association of Queensland and the Waste, Recycling Industry Association Queensland. These aforementioned organisations should be thanked for working together to assist in designing an effective scheme which provides the opportunity for community and social groups to participate in the state's recycling efforts.

In relation to the plastic shopping bag ban, I note four other states and territories have plastic shopping bag bans in place covering single-use lightweight plastic shopping bags which are less than 35 microns in thickness. On average a single-use plastic bag is used for just 12 minutes but it can take up to a thousand years to fully decompose. Australians use over five billion of such plastic shopping bags every year, with an estimated 900 million used here in Queensland. The ban is proposed to commence on 1 July 2018, with a transition phase for consumers and retailers prior to this date. Congratulations to Woolworths and Coles on their recent leadership and associated announcements with regard to this issue. For consumers the message is: take a re-usable bag when shopping and keep re-usable bags in your car so you are always prepared.

Plastic bags break up, not down, into smaller bits, posing an even greater threat for wildlife to swallow. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland has estimated around 30 per cent of sea turtle deaths in Moreton Bay are attributable to plastic ingestion and 70 per cent of loggerheads in Queensland waters have ingested plastics. Some 90 per cent of all seabird species have ingested plastic debris. A joint EM Foundation-World Economic Forum report from 2016 offered the view that at least eight million tonnes of plastic leak into the ocean every year. By 2025 the oceans will contain one tonne of plastic for every three tonnes of fish and by 2050 more plastic than fish. Ongoing efforts to address this issue must be a priority and further research and funding to examine the threats posed by marine plastics and the impacts on human health given the accumulation of plastics in shellfish and fish is something I am deeply concerned about as a medical practitioner.

As I have indicated, the Liberal National Party has a strong track record when it comes to supporting grassroots efforts to clean up our environment, including when last in government in Queensland, by introducing a waste avoidance strategy, partnering with councils to address the problem of roadside litter and, as previously mentioned, administering a successful \$12 million grants program for community organisations to clean up, restore and protect their local environments. The federal LNP coalition government under then prime minister John Howard established the world's first oceans policy in 1998. In fact, it can be said that it is successive LNP coalition federal and state governments that have delivered for the environment, including a prohibition on oil and gas exploration

in the Great Barrier Reef, a ban on whaling, a ban on sandmining on Fraser Island, creating the first stage of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and achieving World Heritage status listing of the Great Barrier Reef.

I return now to the bill. The provisions of this legislation are consistent with the plastic bag bans in other jurisdictions where a ban also applies, with the exception that Queensland's ban also covers biodegradable plastic shopping bags as these bags have the same potential impact on the environment and wildlife as traditional plastic bags if they are littered. However, as with any piece of Labor legislation, there remain a number of questions which I hope the minister can answer. Take for example the following statement by the department in response to submissions—

The bill provides for a regulation to prescribe another thickness of plastic to be a banned bag. This would also allow the thicker, single-use plastic shopping bags to be banned if the need arises.

My question then is: who is it that determines this need? Will it be the same with respect to the oversight of the plastic pollution reduction plan, and what groups are on the independent task force responsible for making such a determination?

With regard to the operation of the board of the Product Responsibility Organisation, PRO, whilst I noted this year's budget allocation, can the minister categorically confirm how much this will cost Queensland taxpayers? Whilst this body is seen to be charged with the rollout of the container deposit scheme across the state, we are still yet to hear what financial resources will be dedicated towards this task in an ongoing manner. If the operation of the scheme is meant to fund the operations of the Product Responsibility Organisation, presumably the initial capital outlay required in order to give the scheme the economies of scale needed to secure its ongoing operation has an evidence base. I note that the main function of the Product Responsibility Organisation is to administer and provide governance for the scheme, including ensuring that ongoing efficient and effective arrangements are available in Queensland for empty beverage containers to be collected, sorted and recycled, and also establishing a network of container refund points to, as far as practicable, provide communities in Queensland with access to a place where empty containers can be returned for the payment of refund amounts.

I note that while Labor expects minimal costs to government associated with the implementation of the plastic bag ban there are costs associated and anticipated around the preparation and delivery of community and retailer awareness. I also understand that the government has entered into a partnership with the National Retail Association to undertake extensive retailer engagement in the lead-up to the introduction of the ban on 1 July 2018 and that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection is expected also to undertake broad community messaging. It would be beneficial for the minister to advise the House what these campaigns are expected to cost taxpayers.

Furthermore, the minister's explanatory notes outline further anticipated cost to taxpayers in relation to the delivery of broad public messaging in the lead-up to the 1 July 2018 commencement of the container deposit scheme in order to provide information about the types of containers to which a refund applies and how the scheme will work. Once again, will the minister outline to the House a summary of what these campaigns are expected to cost taxpayers?

I also note that in relation to the rollout of the container refund scheme the government has identified that there may be a need to provide some small-scale infrastructure grants to community groups and remote local governments and communities. The question facing many councils and groups now is: how do they factor the provision of such infrastructure into their budgets? Where do they go to seek such grants and what are the time frames proposed around such applications being assessed and approved? With regard to the review of the container deposit scheme, I note the bill outlines that the Product Responsibility Organisation will provide quarterly and annual reports directly to the minister. What is not clear is to where they will be asked to send their updates, in what format and will they be made available to the public so taxpayers can assess the rollout of the scheme?

I also note that the bill makes reference to banned plastic bags being banned either by regulation or, if not banned by regulation, being 35 microns in thickness. However, the department's response to submissions states, 'A ban should apply to plastic bags up to 70 microns.' This raises some questions that the minister should clarify so as to ensure that retailers have certainty as they enter this new regime. Is the government looking at moving to a ban of 70-micron bags and, if so, in what time frame is this envisaged?

I support the decision to conduct a review into the operation and effectiveness of the plastic shopping bag ban with a review commencing no later than three months after 1 July 2020. This is important as it will inform us as to whether the uptake of the ban is understood by the public and retail

sector alike. I also draw to the attention of the House the report of the Agriculture and Environment Committee which noted—

The committee anticipates that the recycling industry will play an important role in the implementation and functioning of the proposed container refund scheme. In the committee's view, the inclusion of a recycling industry representative on the product responsibility organisation board will promote balanced representation.

Accordingly, I conditionally support the committee's second recommendation that the bill be amended to mandate the inclusion of a recycling industry representative on the board of the Product Responsibility Organisation. Due to potential or actual conflict of interest aspects, it may be appropriate for the government to support alternative arrangements in order to satisfy this recommendation. I note the minister's comments a little earlier in relation to the matter.

Furthermore, I commend the committee report for taking on board the feedback of stakeholders such as the Chamber of Commerce & Industry Queensland with regard to reviewing the container refund scheme after its commencement. I note the committee report advises that it sees merit in monitoring the performance of the scheme, including that of the Product Responsibility Organisation, after a reasonable amount of time has elapsed after its commencement.

Accordingly, I support the committee's third and fourth recommendations. Recommendation 3 is that the committee recommends that the minister report to the committee on progress in reaching relevant benchmarks within two years of commencement of the container refund scheme. The benchmarks should include key performance indicators for the container refund scheme and Product Responsibility Organisation, including a container recycling target, a convenience and accessibility target in relation to the availability of container refund points and targets relating to social enterprise and innovation and technology outcomes and the appropriate time frame in which those targets are required to be achieved. In terms of recommendation 4, the committee recommends that the minister specify in regulation those benchmarks referred to in recommendation 3.

The other element of the bill that requires clarification is in relation to penalties and compliance with respect to the plastic bag ban. Who will be in charge of enforcing the bag ban? Will this responsibility fall on department of environment officers?

With reference to the other main objectives of the bill, I note the changes to the end-of-waste codes and I understand that the department is attempting to address issues such as the inability to control the use of end-of-waste resources under the Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011. The intention of the end-of-waste framework is for waste to be approved for use as a resource, provided it meets very strict quality criteria that minimise the potential for environmental harm when used as designated. The amendments introduced in the bill seek to enable better control of the end use of resources where necessary to reduce the potential for environmental harm whilst encouraging appropriate and acceptable uses of waste materials. As such, these should be supported. I also note that due diligence has been discharged with respect to the bill being considered against fundamental legislative principles.

In conclusion, the LNP will not oppose the proposed legislation given its benefits to the environment and conservation in Queensland. I look forward to the minister addressing and clarifying some of the aforementioned matters. There is no doubt that we would not be here today without the leadership of the Liberal National Party and our political support for these very important policy initiatives which will deliver for our environment and Queensland.

I note the erratum to the Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017 circulated by the government today. I accept the explicit clarification offered as the basis for the document. I also looked at the foreshadowed amendments that the minister will move as a part of the consideration in detail and I will have further comments about that later.

I place on record my thanks to the members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee and particularly the LNP members for Condamine and Gregory for their due diligence in assessing and evaluating this legislation. I also acknowledge the committee's secretariat for its work. This is a great day for our environment, wildlife, community groups, conservation organisations and all Queenslanders.